Putting South Dakota First
A Technology Agenda for South Dakota

Providing Affordable Broadband Access – Ensuring that every South Dakotan has access to broadband Internet connections is critical. To achieve this goal we need to:

- Press the Federal Communications Commission to implement requirements to cover broadband services, and provide sufficient support for existing rural telecommunications systems. This includes full funding for the E-rate Program to support broadband service in every school and library.
- Provide tax credits to spur deployment to rural areas.
- Provide loans and grants to rural providers through the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and expand RUS's authority to underwrite advanced services.

Encouraging Investment in Small Businesses – Rural America suffers from a tremendous lack of equity capital investment. To address this issue, I have developed legislation that would create a venture capital program within the Rural Development Agency. The program is closely modeled on the SBA's highly-successful Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) program. The Rural Business Investment Companies (RBICs), created under this legislation, would be required to invest one-half of its total capital in rural areas. RBICs will be eligible to leverage their private investments, and to receive matching grants up to $250,000 to assist with the start-up and development costs.

Creating Employment Opportunities Through Technology – We have seen how technology has enhanced education through distance learning and other similar programs. We hope to build on those successful efforts by developing opportunities for people to learn and utilize new skills through distance-based work arrangements. In South Dakota, the Rural Information Technology Employment-Link (RITE-Link) program is already doing this, by providing people living in rural areas with educational and training opportunities in information technology skills. After training is completed, the program matches people with employment opportunities using distance-based work arrangements. We are developing legislation to build on the RITE-Link program by allowing the RUS to make grants to non-profit organizations to provide IT training and distance-based employment opportunities to people living in rural areas.

Strengthening Education and Research – We must enhance education, training and skills if our workers are to maximize their earnings and our state is to maximize its economic growth. Specifically, this agenda would improve math and science education for our children by requiring states to set science educational standards, and ensuring every child in America is computer-literate by the sixth grade. We should also encourage companies to invest more in training and recruitment to help workers develop the IT skills they need. In addition, Congress should double civilian R&D funding, double funding for the National Science Foundation, reverse the slide in Department of Defense R&D spending, make the R&D tax credit permanent and explore its expansion, and fully fund the Advanced Technology Program.

E-Government – Government must become as able a practitioner of electronic business practices as it is a proponent of them. In a rural state like South Dakota, it is especially important that citizens can access their government without having to travel long distances. Along with Sen. Lieberman, I have introduced legislation to create a Chief Information Officer for the federal government. The bill provides funding to implement e-government projects and make digital government work better for the people it serves.

Supporting Local Technology Projects – In addition to legislative efforts, there is much to be done to support local technology efforts at the federal level. Examples include:

- Sioux Falls Business Accelerator – $500,000 in this year's Senate appropriations bill. The Sioux Falls Business Accelerator will provide support services for startup technology companies in Sioux Falls.
- Madison Technical Center – $250,000 in this year's Senate appropriations bill for this facility. The Madison Technical Center will offer support services for startup technology companies in Madison.
- USD-DSU-SDSU Center for Higher Education – $2.2 million in last year's appropriations bill for technology equipment for the USD-DSU-SDSU Center for Higher Education.